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Ones Tenebris: The Dark Ones

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Abstract

Our story takes place in a world deep beyond the veil that connects light and dark. As I bear witness to the times we are in I cannot help but feel that the world is immersed in darkness, a negative energy, heavy and all encompassing. Emerging from the darkness like a predator, the dark ones stalk us. Our collective psychosis in turn leads to the veil between our worlds to thin. These “Dark Ones” as it were, occupy the deepest depths of a world unimaginable, a void of despair and dread so powerful that light and goodness are rumors. The dark ones feed on this negative energy and fear that our world generates, they are drawn to it like moths to a flame. This dark world is a place where the beauty and light are replaced by pain and thorns. The dark ones are a result of our collective dread. The negative energies have spilled forth, opening a chasm between our world and theirs. This work represents a collection of portraits, visual musings of the creatures and their settings that dwell on the threshold of this nightmare world. These beings play in the darkness, live under our beds and in our sub-consciousness. They wait for the lights to go out, and for you to enter their world.

Ones Tenebris

The Dark Ones

By

Jason M. Cheney

B.F.A., SUNY Oswego, 2008

M.A.T., SUNY Oswego, 2010

Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Illustration

Syracuse University

May 2019

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- XIX. *Somnum Exterrerri Duodecim*, graphite, 2019
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I. On your mark, get ready...

I love to make monsters! I love to explore and engage with the things that go bump in the night, live under our beds and in our closets! My work serves to expose the nightmare visions that dwell within our subconscious and uses elements of science fiction, horror, fantasy and surrealism along with figurative subjects as a basis for its technical and conceptual design.

My love for this subject matter has been with me since a small child, perhaps even in the womb. I was raised on a healthy dose of horror, science fiction and fantasy. Nothing else satiates my creative needs. This diet consists of classic monsters all the way up to and including the most recent offerings. This diet also consisted of other treats that would shape my artistic self. Comedy, music, literature; I have always had a tendency to like the darker aspects of most things. I couldn't get enough! I loved to be scared and engage in things just a little twisted. Happy endings were boring, and I often rooted for the bad guy.

This naturally permeated into my art as I found that I had an overactive imagination. As I grew older I discovered some amazing artists who would help me shape my imagery. Carlos Huante, Wayne Barlowe and the great Michael Kaluta along with others influenced me and opened up a whole new world of visual possibilities. I would describe my work as exercises in self-indulgence.

I am deeply ensconced within Geek culture. As a kid it was never cool and it was a lonely place to be. What I find exciting now is that all of the things I loved as a kid are accepted and very much part of the pop culture conversation. The artists I like, the events

I take part in and even the company I keep, all serve to reinforce my artistic loves. I seem to always associate myself with people and places that have a specific bond to these things. This group of freaks and geeks, as it were, share in my love for the sick, twisted and just a little profane, but are also unapologetic for what it is and what it means to them.

I am an artist, introvert, and lover of sick and twisted things. I make no apologies for the things I love and the work I make.

I also have a serious love for cats and desperately want to become a bird watcher, but that's a story for another time...

It begins in February of 1975...

I was thrust into this world in the deepest, darkest reaches of upstate New York. As a young boy, I developed an overactive imagination and a love for all things Horror and Science Fiction. As I grew older, the range of ideas in my work grew to incorporate universal themes of personal discovery and growth, coupled with my continued love of Science Fiction, Horror with a sprinkling of surrealism interwoven between, beneath, and behind the work.

I am influenced and rooted within the field of traditional illustration. Traditional illustration can be described as the use of the traditional physical tools such as pencil, pen, paint etc. This is not to say that I do not like the more modern digital approach to illustration, I just feel that, for me, there is a disconnection between these two worlds. I love the feel of pencil, pen or brush on some kind of physical surface!

My art uses elements of science fiction, fantasy, and surrealism along with figurative subjects as a basis for the technical and conceptual foundation of its design. I like to make use of pairing odd juxtapositions to create subjects that blend and blur realities. My work contains themes of internal and personal explorations combined with mythic and spiritual ideas and transformation.

I am also influenced by works emblazoned across many Heavy Metal and Progressive metal/rock record covers, along with countless comic books, movie posters and other sources of visual eye candy.

My work is born out of daydreaming. I do a lot of thinking before I even put a single mark on the page. The point is that for me, thinking is sketching and just like an author that does not use an outline, they let the words take them where they go, I do the same thing with the line. This process was born out of my past life where time to work on art was almost non existent and therefore precious. So I thought about my ideas all the time and worked out problems in my head. I knew that when I was finally able to sit down and get the work out, I had a finite amount of time, so I had to make the best of it.

Most recently... I have been looking back in order to move forward. I have recently started making work reflecting on my time as an adolescent, only now, armed with sharper skills and a wider palate of ideas. There is spontaneity to my work that is infused with methodic preparation. This new work has culminated into a new series entitled, *Ones Tenebris*. This work represents a collection of creatures and their settings that haunt my inner Sanctum Sanctorum. It is composed of beasts that dwell on the threshold of my nightmares and dreamscapes, a world beyond the veil of humanity.

These are the beings that play in the darkness, that wait for the lights to go out, and for you to enter their world but, most importantly, a glimpse into the world of my imagination. Once again... exercises in self-indulgence!

II. *The meat and potatoes...*

Most recently my art has taken me back to my roots and first love...Monsters. This came about as I found I was not having that much fun with the work I was creating. Yes, there were personal demons that needed to be exorcised and I wanted my past work to have something to say that would allow the viewer to dig a little deeper into the message behind the image. My most recent work, is really nothing like that, it is visceral and specific.

I was thinking about what was next. I kept being drawn to the things that as a kid, I loved. I had flirted with these ideas for several years on and off, but the work I was engaged in at the time demanded my attention. Now that the slate was blank, I had to have a conversation with myself and chart my new course. I have a morbid personality and a fascination with dark things. Terrible things dance around in my creative subconscious mind. Nothing pleases me more than to unleash these beasties onto the blank surface. I also have a love for subjects used within the heavy metal and progressive genres of music as they employ visuals and themes that to me are both stimulating and ferocious.

As I have stated before that although I do not feel as though I am a slave to nostalgia, I have actively decided to rekindle my relationship with my 16-year-old self. Sometimes we have to go back in order to move forward, go back to the well as it were, to find meaning in what we do. My teenage years were the happiest in terms of creation and just making the work I liked to make. As I have aged, my skill level in terms of technical ability in conjunction with compositional maturity, has allowed me to create things that were at one time beyond my ability.

I started my MFA program at the end of one journey and looking to the next chapter, not really sure where it was that I wanted to go. Up until 2016, I had spent the last several years working on a body of work that was very personal and ripe with universal themes mixed with my style of visual story telling. It was during my second semester as a grad student that the answer hit me like a two-ton heavy thing! I am very much inspired and driven by horror and science fiction themed imagery and subject matter. This has been ingrained within my DNA, probably since birth.

It was then that I went back to move forward. As much as I had loved making the personal pieces that dominated my work for several years, it wasn't always fun. Even though I was emotionally invested in the creation of those pieces something was missing.

MONSTERS!!!

This is what drew me to art in the first place. I was raised on a healthy dose of science fiction, horror and fantasy. All of this could be placed under the umbrella of speculative fiction. In order to move forward I had to look back and reconnect with my younger self. I had started producing some work that served to shake the cobwebs from my collective conscious and help sharpen my chops, both mentally and physically in regards to the creation of scary and morbid things. I thought they turned out well, but it was not where I wanted it to be. It did prove that I still had it in me and that the fire for those things had been reignited, which brings me to today and the title for my new undertaking... *Ones Tenebris* , its Latin translation being, *The Dark Ones*.

III. My influences...

As artists, we begin our journey as visual communicators by bringing to light and harnessing our overactive imaginations.

As young artists there is an uncertainty as to how we might channel our active minds. We question what it is we do and how we want to do it. Somewhere along the way we begin to seriously contemplate what it is to be an artistic type. It is from here that as an artist, we will look at the fork in the road and decide on a path to traverse down. Along the way we start to make discoveries. It is from this exploration that we discover artists who begin to shape who we want to be, or at least think we want to be, as makers of things.

It is hard to narrow things down to a select few, but in the grand scheme of things, I can whittle it down to the major players in my development, heroes if you will. Included are examples of the work that encapsulates why these artists stand out as influential creators.

Carlos Huante

What drew me to Huante's work was the interesting way that his monsters came to life. I have seen plenty of monster images, and to an extent, I love them all! Something about Carlos's work was unique to my eye. Carlos's creature/character creations are what initially attracted my interest. They just oozed something different; the monsters had a style to them that scratched an itch! Looking at his work really helped me arrive to an answer to the question of what I really wanted to do with my own art. Within the last year I felt I was personally on the cusp of doing something different with my work. I had explored a facet to my art that I felt I had finally come to a conclusion with. I had a rumbling of what I wanted to do next but was uncertain how to satiate my thirst for a new creative endeavor. After seeing his work, and really looking at it, I finally had the beginnings of where I was going to go next. Carlos was responsible for reigniting my love for monsters, but also for giving me the courage to explore and reconcile my older artistic self with that of my younger, more care free self. I learned to trust my instinct and make the work I wanted to make, to not worry about its acceptance on a larger scale, and to accept the niche I was and wanted to be in.

Carlos gave me the answer to a riddle, the lighting to a darkened path, and a validation to an epiphany I was reluctant to utter and embrace. My most recent work represents my journey back to my roots, which is not to imply being a slave to nostalgia, but an embrace for the enthusiasm of what got me into art in the first place!

Wayne Barlowe

Barlowe has done conceptual work for motion pictures ranging from James Cameron's *Avatar* to several Harry Potter movies. He also had his own action figure line, The Powerlords, which I remember playing with as a child long before I knew him as an influential artist.

It was stumbling upon two books, *Barlowe's Guide to Extraterrestrials* and *Barlowe's Inferno* that would get my brain thinking differently about creature creation. Like Carlos Huante, Barlowe's approach to creature creation is very different from what I had been used to. Barlowe would really get into the creature creation by first envisioning the world it inhabited. What I mean by this was that he would immerse himself into the biological makeup of various worlds. His research into these various chemical and biological factors would dictate how these creatures would come into existence. I always thought it was silly and ill informed to create aliens and monsters based upon human proportions and properties, especially if it did not originate here on earth. When I was younger, an artistic friend would always call me out for my lack of anatomical correctness with my monsters and aliens. My response was, they don't have to! They're

monsters and aliens... they are not from this world/dimension and do not have to follow the same rules that apply to humans!

When I link both Huante and Barlowe together, it's the uniqueness of their designs that have influenced me, even though I discovered them many years apart. Discovering Barlowe early in my life prepared me for embracing Huante's work later on.

I find that I share similar design sensibilities, which for me, help to really serve the image as it pertains to the subject matter at the heart of the piece. I am also drawn to the ways both Huante and Barlowe embrace their own intuitions and confidences when deciding on what they want to do as artists.

I have come to embrace a kind of certainty in what I want my work to be and what I might want to do with it, which is a similar trait held by the artists I most admire. I think there is something to be said for understanding and embracing your own intuition and letting that guide you. Art is a personal and private thing and it is important to retain a sense of personal identity and creative control. I will make plenty of mistakes and questionable work, but I am making them on my own terms and not embracing someone else's dogmatic persuasions.

Michael Kaluta

I first discovered Michael Kaluta by way of a Glenn Danzig record cover entitled, *Black Aria*. This illustration blew me away! I have always been into record and CD

illustrations and even flirted with getting into that genre, but never did. That particular piece for *Black Aria* was just as influential on me as another record cover, Derrick Rigg's, *Somewhere in time* for the metal band Iron Maiden, albeit for different reasons. I have always loved Alphonse Mucha's design sense and his use of interesting design elements in his work. These can be seen in Kaluta's work to a certain extent, and I tend to use a similar design sense in the work I have created. Kaluta's work also has a quality that has served to influence the way I put things together in an attempt to convey a narrative. His compositional sense just speaks to me and that visual language serves to play directly into my own aesthetic needs as an artist.

Kaluta's creations are pure eye candy to me. I love everything about his work and even though I strive to have my own style, Kaluta's fingerprints are all over my own art.

Carlos Huante, Wayne Barlowe and Michael Kaluta have served as influential mentors in helping shape the artist I am. Although there have been others, and those contributions can by no means be discounted, these three serve as some of the heavy weights that have helped to shape my voice.

Each of these artists brings something interesting in regards to their individual design sense and uniqueness to their creations. All three have a visual expression that leads to a fresh perspective in the science fiction and fantasy genres. I can also relate and appreciate their approach as individuals to the creation of their work. Their individual integrity has led them to make art that not only serves the work, but also serves their own creative needs. They have found balance, which is something I continually strive for in life and in my own work.

When asked to describe my most recent work to people, I find myself gravitating towards two artists that I feel I share some artistic sensibilities with. This would be the works of H.R. Giger and Stephen Gammell. Both Giger and Gammell work within a surrealist vein and typically stick to a limited color palette or black and white imagery. This closely resembles my own choices in terms of style and subject matter.

If H.R. Giger and Stephen Gammell, along with Michael Kaluta were to have a love child, I would be the result of this ghoulish and ghastly interaction!

These are the greats and I would never presume to include my work in the same league as them. Which leads me to the ongoing practice of doing just that... practicing my craft. Huante, Barlowe, Kaluta, Giger and Gammell, along with others are inspirations that drive me to be better. I jokingly raise my fist in the air and curse their existence, but really I marvel at their creations!

IV. From genesis to fruition... my creative process

As I began to let loose my visions, I realized that my medium of choice is graphite. I love the visual drama of light and dark and that feeling of pencil on paper. I love the black and white image and graphite seems to really bring my beasts to life and allows me to bring them into being in ways other mediums do not.

I have two ways that I begin the framework for a drawing. The first is the employment of a word bank or interest inventory. This could be an expansive list or a short and concise listing. I always think or write down words that will help lead me into

images. I find that having that word or words helps me to develop that initial spark for an image and then its go time! Of course that word bank gets whittled down into its core concise parts. This probably represents the most in terms of sketchbook work I might do. I also do not keep a traditional sketchbook. I find having a thick sketchbook, cumbersome and intimidating as I feel as though I have to fill it, which preoccupies my image making. Instead, I always have a ream of simple copy paper strictly for drawing, using the individual sheets to play on. It allows me to focus on the drawing in front of me with no distractions.

From there, I start with a vision in my head in conjunction with the rough layout on the paper; I keep this in mind as I start laying down the foundation of the image. From there I allow myself to put pencil to surface and see where it goes. I ultimately know where I want to go with the drawing, but I allow myself to explore differing elements, to aid in the spontaneous construction of what the idea was and is. At the end of the drawing I have a culmination of the pre-conceived idea, but now it has been infused with off-the-cuff elements that were never part of the idea that was originally in my mind. This is why I have learned to trust my intuition. It had always served me well. Maybe this is a product of being fiercely introverted. I have absorbed many things while in school and thanks to the influence of my professors and mentors, have added many things to my toolbox, and have mixed that with a healthy dose of playing on my own. Knowing the rules and learning how to break them seems to be the hallmark quality to any artist. I have learned the bulk of what I know by playing on my own.

This goes for the story of the subject matter as well. Most often I do not have a preconceived story. The story has its basic ideas based upon the previous things I described, but it evolves as I am drawing. The story follows the line and develops and builds from there. Once I have a finished creation, I will solidify the story behind it as I now have a full and completed view of what it is I have made.

Through the course of my development, I have been able to take important lessons that I have been able to glean from various mentors. After all, it is important to listen to those who can help you shape your world of images and nurture your ultimate vision. I infuse them with my own ideas, crafting a process that best suits me and my aesthetic/creative needs. I am the culmination of formal and informal methods, a nexus point of different traditions and serving the needs of the muse.

V. *Monsters...*

I love monsters and all the things that go bump in the night! I am very much influenced by artists who create in these particular genres as well. I am very much a work in progress. I have recently begun creating the body of work that I am really excited about. With every new venture comes a grace period where we have to get ourselves in proper shape. I finally feel I am firing on all cylinders now!

This new work has culminated into a new series entitled, *Ones Tenebris*, *The Dark Ones*. The story takes place in the world deep beyond the veil that connects light

and dark. As I bear witness to the times we are in I cannot help but feel that the world is immersed in darkness, a negative energy, heavy and all encompassing. Emerging from the darkness like a predator, the dark ones stalk us. Our collective psychosis in turn leads to the veil between our worlds to thin. These “Dark Ones” as it were, occupy the deepest depths of a world unimaginable, a void of despair and dread so powerful that light and goodness are rumors. The dark ones feed on this negative energy and fear that our world generates, they are drawn to it like moths to a flame. This dark world is a place where the beauty and light are replaced by pain and thorns. The dark ones are a result of our collective dread. The negative energies have spilled forth, opening a chasm between our world and theirs. This work represents a collection of portraits, visual musings of the creatures and their settings that dwell on the threshold of this nightmare world. These beings play in the darkness, live under our beds and in our sub consciousness. They wait for the lights to go out, and for you to enter their world.

VI. *A light at the end of the tunnel...where do we go from here?*

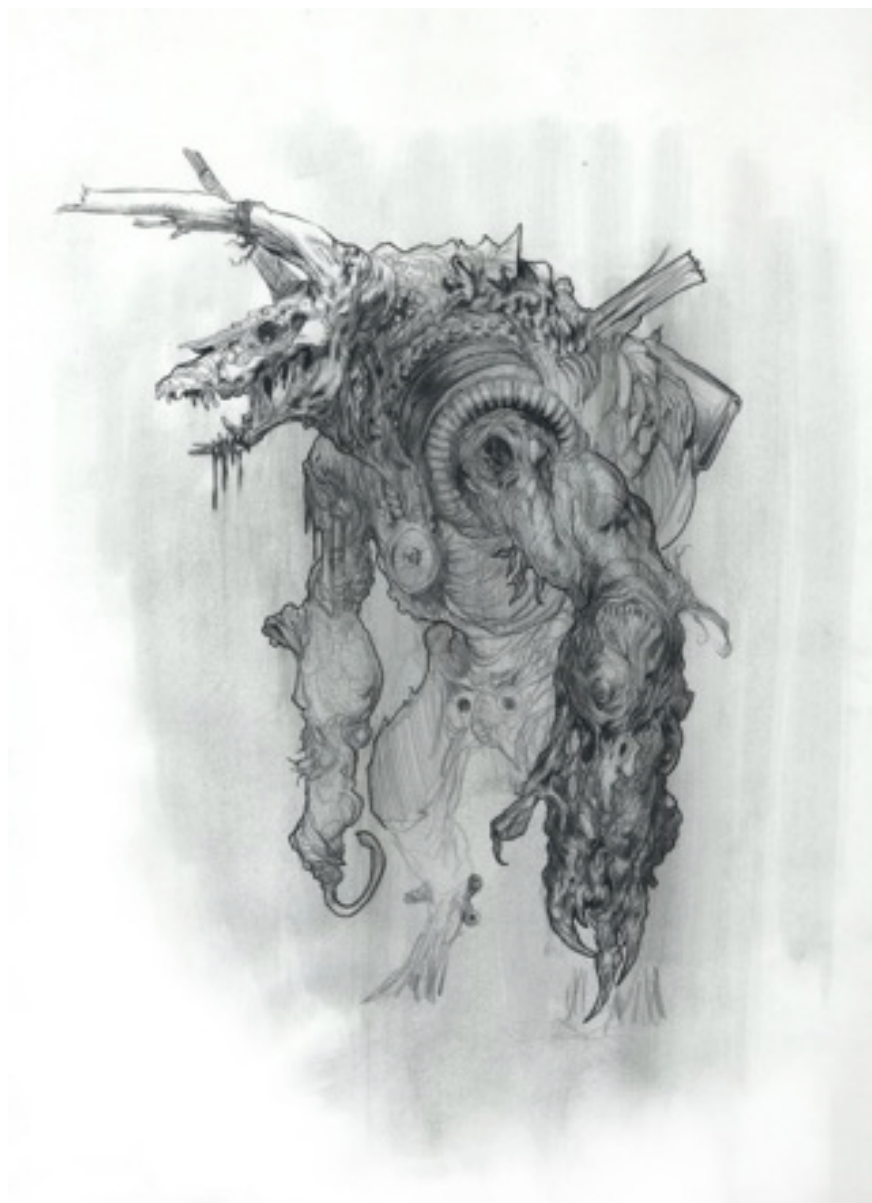
Sometimes you have to make a lot of bad work to get to the good. Most recently I have had a break through, and I can honestly say that I am creating things that both my younger and older self can be very happy with. We are indeed working as one creative, focused unit and the thing I desperately needed, the fun and play of creation, has returned. I have fulfilled the goals I have laid out for myself at the beginning of my most

recent educational journey. I am having fun and have had fun creating these new pieces. I have been able to merge the old with the new and do so while keeping my artistic integrity intact. I have and will continue to make the work I want to make and in the way that I want to make it.

So for now I will continue to move forward, I will continue to push myself further into the educational aspect of things as I love just about everything there is to being an educator/mentor. I know my niche in regards to my work and will continue to display at various conventions and gallery spaces that showcase the art I specialize in. In regards to further marketing of my art, it was never going to be something I was ever going to get rich doing. It was never about that; it's always been about the art. I will continue to nurture the slow burn in regards to finding an audience and any financial and professional opportunities that befall me. It was always about having a small but dedicated group of admirers. Observers of ones craft that come along for the ride and sticks with you, waiting for what comes next.

On top of all else, I will continue to embrace the yin and yang of my artistic existence. Pushing the demons of doubt back and letting my confidence show through. Most importantly, I will continue to have fun and be a caretaker of wonder, dreamer and guy who draws.

Artist Gallery



Carlos Huante, *Untitled*, graphite, 2008



Wayne Barlowe, *Vasparian Minstrel*, graphite, 1980



Michael Kaluta, *Donna Mia I*, watercolor, 1995



H.R. Giger, *Li I*, air brush, 1974



Stephen Gammell, *Bess*, ink, 1991

Jason Cheney: Older work



Jason Cheney, *Aspiciens Ultra*, mixed media, 2013



Jason Cheney, *Alis Volat Propriis*, mixed media, 2015

JASON CHENEY

ONES TENEBRIS, THE DARK ONES





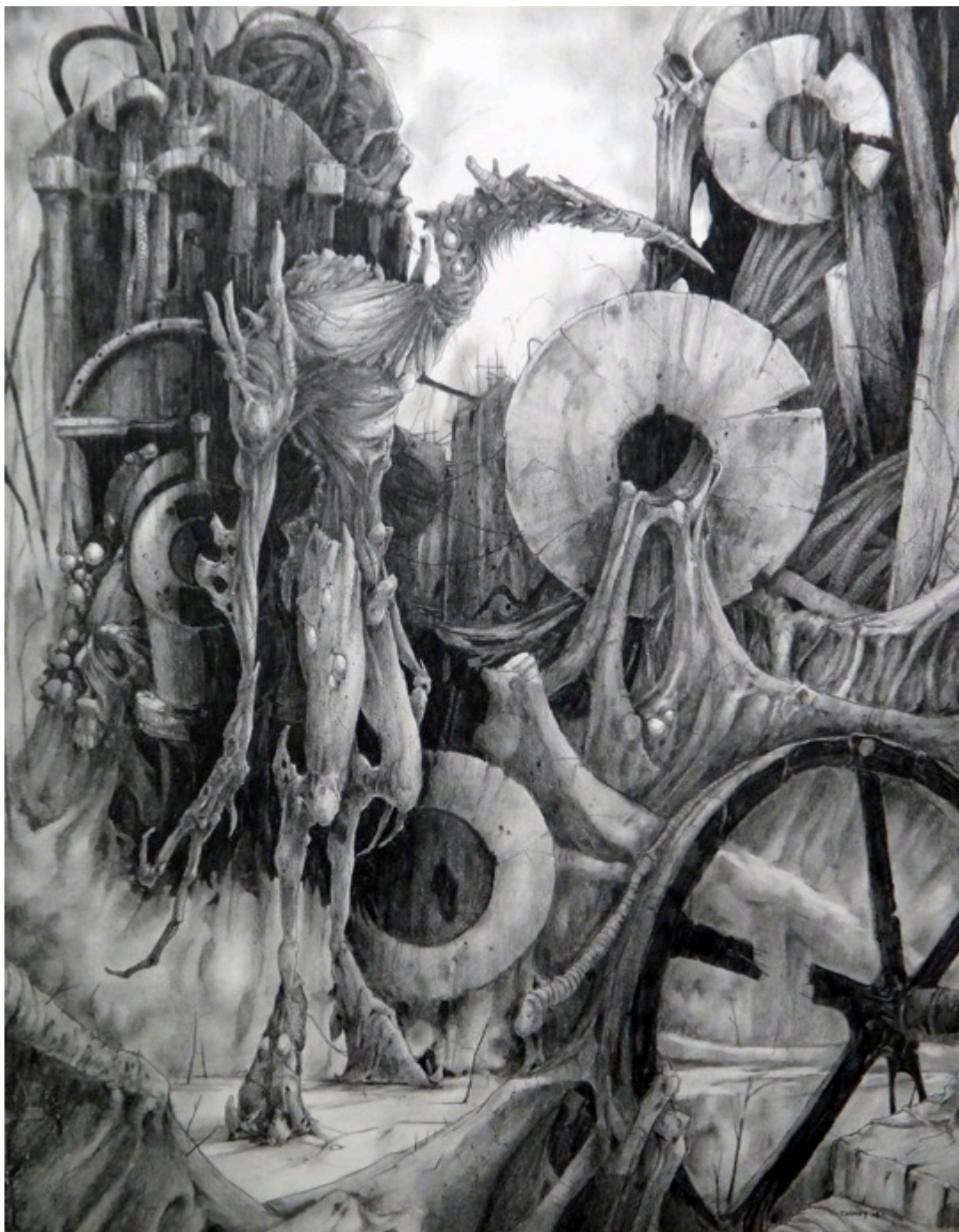
Jason Cheney, *Somnum Extererri Unus*, graphite, 2019



Jason Cheney, *Somnum Exterreri Duo*, graphite, 2019



Jason Cheney, *Somnum Exterreri Tribus*, graphite, 2019



Jason Cheney, *Somnum Exterreri Quattuor*, graphite, 2019



Jason Cheney, *Somnum Exterreri Quinque*, graphite, 2019



Jason Cheney, *Somnum Exterreri Sex*, graphite, 2019



Jason Cheney, *Somnum Exterreri Septem*, graphite, 2019



Jason Cheney, *Somnum Exterreri Octo*, graphite, 2019



Jason Cheney, *Somnum Exterreri Novem*, graphite, 2019



Jason Cheney, *Somnum Exterreri Decem*, graphite, 2019



Jason Cheney, *Somnum Exterreri Undecim*, graphite, 2019



Jason Cheney, *Somnum Exterreri Duodecim*, graphite, 2019



Jason Cheney, *Somnum Exterreri Tredecim*, graphite, 2019



Jason Cheney, *Somnum Exterreri Quattuordecim*, graphite, 2019

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waynebarlowe.wordpress.com. October 20th, 2018.

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<http://www.carlos-huante-monstruo.com/>. October 21st, 2018.

<http://www.kaluta.com/>. October 19th, 2018.

Vita

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Education:

Masters Degree in Teaching: Art Education K-12, May 2010, State University of New York at Oswego.

Bachelor of Fine Arts, May 2008, State University of New York at Oswego.
College of Visual and Performing Arts. Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York 2003.

Columbia College (extension site) Hancock Field. Syracuse, New York 2001-2002.

Jefferson Community College. Watertown, New York 1994.

Watertown High School. Watertown, New York, graduated in June of 1993.

Student Teaching:

September-December 2009

Canastota Junior/Senior High School

Canastota, New York

Under Supervision, planned and taught units of study in grades 9-12

September-December 2008

Blodgett Elementary and Middle School

Syracuse, New York

Under supervision, planned and taught units of study in grades K-8.

Field Experience:

August 2010-Current.

Adjunct Professor: Art Department, State University of New York at Oswego.

Classes taught: Art 102- Topics in Traditional Media and Methods: Drawing.

Art 102- Topics in Traditional Media and Methods: Design.

Art 105- Design concepts: 2 2-Dimensional.

Art 205- Design concepts: 3 2-Dimensional.

Art 210- Drawing 1.

Art 300- Figure drawing

Art 322- Drawing for Transfer Students

Art 312- Traditional Illustration 1.

Art 412- Traditional Illustration 2.

December 2010-April 2011.

Replacement Art Teacher, Fulton City School district.

Taught classes for Mrs. Heather LaPlante, Art Teacher K-6, Granby Elementary.

September-October 2010.

Replacement Art Teacher, Canastota Central School District.

Taught classes for Mrs. Kristie Boisen, Art Teacher 9-12, Canastota Junior/Senior High School

Classes taught included: Studio in Art, Drawing and Painting 1, Portfolio Development, Ceramics.

May- June 2010.

Replacement Art Teacher, Canastota Central School District.

Taught classes for Mrs. Denise Whalen, Art Teacher 9-12, Canastota Junior/Senior High School.

Classes taught included: Computer Graphics, Traditional Photography, Digital Photography, Advertising and Design, Digital Design for Production.

August-November 2008, January-May 2009.

Teaching/Graduate Assistant, Figure Drawing, sections 1, 2, 3

Professor Juan Perdiguero, State University of New York at Oswego.

January-May 2009.

Teaching/Graduate Assistant, Drawing, Section 1, 2, 3

Professor Juan Perdiguero, State University of New York at Oswego.

Related Work Experience:

August-November 2008, January-May 2009.

Graduate Assistant: Drawing Department, State University of New York at Oswego.

Memberships:

New York State Art Teachers Association.

National Arts Education Association

Jefferson Technical National Honor Society

Commissions and Publications:

- 1996 Terminal Fright, Issue number 12. Black River, New York
- 1996 Terminal Fright, Issue number 11. Black River, New York
- 1995 Terminal Fright, Issue number 10. Black River, New York
- 1995 Terminal Fright, Issue number 9. Black River, New York
- 1995 Business Card for the Punk Alternative Band, Head on a Stick. Fort Drum, New York
- 1995 Private collection, Kevin Monaghan, Watertown, New York.
- 1994 Private collection, Tim Anderson, Watertown, New York.

Exhibitions:

- 2018 Group show: Gear Factory
- 2017 Private show: Internum Opera
- 2016 Group show: House of S. Jay
- 2016 Faculty Art Show: SUNY Oswego
- 2015 Faculty Art Show: SUNY Oswego
- 2014 Lakeside Statewide Juried Art Exhibition
- 2011 Faculty Art Show: SUNY Oswego
- 2010 Faculty Art Show: SUNY Oswego
- 2010 Generations 2 MAT Art Show: SUNY Oswego
- 2010 The 13th Annual Lakeside Statewide Juried Art Exhibition
- 2009 Statewide SUNY art exhibition
- 2008 Bachelor of fine Arts exhibition. State University of New York at Oswego
- 1994 Black River Revue, Jefferson Community College. Watertown, New York
- 1993 Jefferson Technical Expo, Jefferson County Vocational Center. Watertown, New York

Awards and Honors:

- 2010 Honorable mention: Lakeside Statewide Juried Art Exhibition
- 2008 Recipient of the Aulus W. Saunders Service Award
- 2004 Deans list (fall semester) State University of New York at Oswego
- 2003 Deans list (spring semester) Syracuse University
- 1993 Jefferson Technical National Honor Society induction

